

The Colt Model 1851 Navy revolver and its purchase by the Western Australian Police Force

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The Belt Pistol of Navy size, or, as it is commonly known, the Model 1851 Colt revolver is one of the best known of the various models manufactured by Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company of Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A., between 1851 – 1873. Colt's also had a manufacturing facility in London, at Millbank, between 1853 and 1857, and thereafter a sales office in Pall Mall. It is from the Pall Mall depot that many public and private purchases of Colt's revolvers by Australia originated, including the revolvers now under discussion.

THE W.A. POLICE REVOLVER

The Western Australian Museum Arms and Armour Collection possesses a Model 1851 Colt revolver, W513), which is marked on the top of the barrel "Address Col. Colt London". The serial number is 37468, and engraved on the steel buttstrap in script is "Police Force Western Australia" (see Figures 1 and 2). The revolver bears British proof marks and is typical of the variation known as London-London, meaning that it is a London made London type, rather than the London type actually made in the U.S.A. The London type has more rounded screw heads than the U.S. type and also has steel butt straps rather than brass. A check of London production records shows that the year of manufacture was 1856.¹

Research in the state archives resulted in the location of a document from the W.A. Agent General in London, P.G. Julian, to the W.A.

government, dated 18th August 1859. This document advises the W.A. government that three cases, containing "Revolvers and Swords for the Police Force", had been despatched per the "Crystal Palace"² (see Figure 3).

Further search revealed an invoice dated 28th July 1859, from Colts' of Pall Mall, London, to the W.A. government, for two tin-lined cases containing 24 Belt Pistols with spare parts, flasks, holsters and pouches. The government, it is noted on the bottom of the invoice, were charged one shilling for each pistol to have them engraved "Police Force W. Australia"³ (see Figure 4). The third case of the shipment per the "Crystal Palace" is also revealed in the archives. A receipt from Parker, Field and Son of High Holborn, London, dated 9th August 1859, describes 24 Cavalry Swords, with bags, and knots. A note on the invoice informs the W.A. government that they were

¹ Wilson, R.L., "Colt Dates of Manufacture, 1837 – 1978", M. Albert, Victoria, 1983, p.6.

² Battye Library, C.S.O. Correspondence, Acc. 36/419/47.

³ Battye Library, C.S.O. Correspondence, Acc. 36/419/49.



Figure 1 The Colt Model 1851. Manufactured at Colt's premises in London in 1856, it was purchased in a lot of 24 by the Western Australian Police Force in 1859 (Photo D. Elford).



Figure 2 The butt strap of this Colt revolver is engraved "Police Force – Western Australia". Some revolvers from this shipment are engraved "Police Force W. Australia" (Photo D. Elford).

correct "Police Force Western Australia". This shipment was packed in one tin-lined case⁴ (see Figure 5). There is no doubt that the three cases containing revolvers and swords for the Police Force, described in the P.G. Julian advice of 18th August 1859, are these three cases.

No swords by this maker and with this marking are known as yet, but the revolver residing in the W.A. Museum collection is certainly one of the 24 belt pistols ordered in 1859. The engraved legend "Police Force Western Australia" and the place of manufacture, name of manufacturer and date of manufacture all conform to the date of this shipment. The revolver was obviously produced in 1856 and remained in store until ordered by W.A. in 1859.

It was decided to canvas the private and institutional Colt collections in Australia to ascertain whether any other of the 23 companion revolvers had survived. This was done by informal inquiries culminating in telephone contact with eastern states collectors. The result was, including the W.A. Museum revolver, a total of six survivors, and possibly a seventh. It was discovered that many of these revolvers contained mismatched parts, that is, the major components such as frame, butt strap, barrel, cylinder, barrel wedge and loading lever, which are all numbered to conform to the serial number allocated to the frame of the revolver, were found not to match.

The W.A. Museum revolver has a mismatched cylinder, and with three exceptions, all other revolvers are also mismatched (see Table 1). The reason for this mismatching is determined to be probably a result of a Police armourer who was not particular in re-assembling these revolvers when they were sent in for stripping and servicing, or equally possible, they were kept in service for so long that it eventually became necessary to "cannibalise" some to keep the others operative. It is possible of course that these mismatched parts are from revolvers other than police arms, but two factors mitigate against this being the case. Firstly,

of the Australian survivors, all mismatched parts are from a 900 digit range of numbers in the 37,400 – 38,300 serial range of the revolvers themselves. Secondly, if these parts were installed years later from various sources, they would either be unnumbered spare parts, or would include at least one high serial number from revolvers current when these arms were wearing out. It is believed

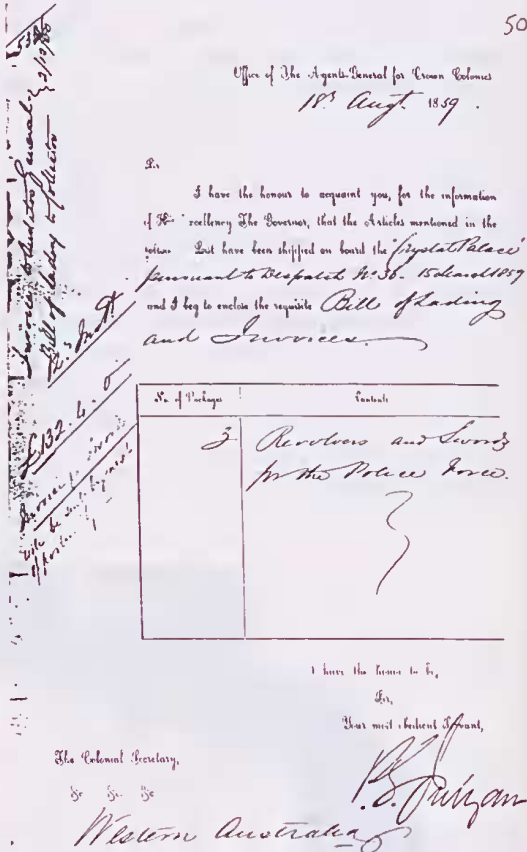


Figure 3 The shipping advice dated 18th August 1859 advising the W.A. Government that three cases of "Revolvers and Swords for the Police Force" have been dispatched (Battye Library).

⁴ Battye Library, C.S.O. Correspondence, Acc. 36/419/47.

CAUTION.
Notice is given to all Customers
of ARMS & AMMUNITION CO. LTD.
that the Company's name is not to be used
in connection with any other business.

SAMUEL COLT,
MANUFACTURER OF FIRE-ARMS.

NOTICE.
Customers Orders to be made
payable at the Western Union
Money Order Office.

The Arms and Ammunition Co. Ltd.,
London, July 28th 1897.

For the Service of -
the Govt of Australia - B.O.F. SAML COLT,
Extra Force - 2 Tins #1 + 2

Terms - Cash

14, Pall Mall, (S.W.)

	No of Pistol.	Raced.			Nett.			Sett.		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
HOLLAND'S CARBIDE PISTOL, 7 INCH RIFLE BARREL, SIX SHOTS. Weight 1lb 2oz (32 Conical and 48 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
PUMP FOR THE HOLLAND ON LLOYD PATENT, RIFLED 7 INCH BARREL, SIX SHOTS. Weight 2 lb 5 oz (24 Conical and 18 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
FORD'S SIX RIFLE BARREL, POKET PRIMER, FIVE SHOTS. Weight 23 oz (14 Conical and 126 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
FIVE INCH RIFLE BARREL, POKET REVOLVER, FIVE SHOTS. Weight 24 oz (14 Conical and 126 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
SIX INCH RIFLE BARREL, POKET REVOLVER, FIVE SHOTS. Weight 26 oz (14 Conical and 126 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
HOLLAND'S CARBIDE PISTOL, 7 INCH RIFLE BARREL, SIX SHOTS. Weight 1lb 2oz (32 Conical and 48 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
PATENT SIX-SHOT RIFLE, 7 INCH BARREL, SIX SHOTS. Weight 2 lb 5 oz (24 Conical and 18 Round Balls to the lb); with Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
Same Weapon, in Case complete, with 500 Caps, Flask, Mould, Wrench, and Cleaning Rod.										
DAILY PREPARED PAPER OF THIS PISTOL CARTRIDGE 1/4										
Date _____ Rifle _____										
Date METALLIC-LINED PISTOL 1/4										
Date DOUBLE WATERPROOF RIFLE CAPS										

2 Tin lines deal Cases

£ 132. 4. 0

Figure 4 The invoice for 24 Colts' revolvers marked and issued to the W.A. Police Force (Battye Library).

P.S. July an Co. - London Aug 9. 1857
 Messrs. Barker Field & Sons.
 (Gun Makers to Her Majesty)
 "The Police Magazine" published by Messrs. G. W. Johnson,
 Stationers to the Metropolitan Police Force,
 22, High Holborn, London.

24 Cavalry Swords ————— }
 24 No Embossed }
 Police Force Western Australia } 24
 2/6-
 Packing Case lined with tin ————
 £25-
 The Officer administering
 The Government
 Western Australia

Figure 5 The invoice for 24 cavalry swords marked and issued to the W.A. Police Force (Battye Library).

Table 1 Serial numbers and markings of known W.A. Police Colt Revolvers.

Location	Revolver no.	Mismatched part	Part no.	Engraved
Western Australia	37468	Cylinder	37598	Western
Western Australia	37434	—— all matching ——		Western
South Australia	37757	Barrel	37813	W.
		Loading lever	37813	
		Cylinder	37408	
		Wedge	38251	
Victoria	37854	—— all matching ——		W.
Victoria	38244	Loading lever	37802	Not stated
New South Wales	37802	—— all matching ——		Not stated
England	37931	Loading lever	17822	W.

Note: The author has inspected the W.A. Museum specimen. All other revolvers are “as reported”.

therefore that all these mismatched numbers came from the 23 companion revolvers of the 1859 shipment. From these parts it is possible to determine the serial numbers of ten of the Police revolvers. They are 37408, 37434, 37468, 37598, 37757, 37802, 37813, 37854, 38244 and 38251. The sixth, New South Wales, revolver is reported to be all matching numbers, yet its serial number, 37802, appears on a loading lever on revolver number 38244. This item is as yet unconfirmed. All other revolvers are reported to be London-London type, British Proved, steel buttstraps and engraved in script, “Police Force Western Australia”, or “Police Force W. Australia”. A seventh revolver has been reported from England. It is engraved “Police Force W. Australia”, and is serial number 37931. The loading lever is serial numbered 17822, the only part not from the police serial range. This English revolver brings the known serial numbers to eleven. It is unknown why there are two

variations in backstrap engravings. Possibly “Western” was a mistake made on a few pistols which was corrected to plain ‘W’ on subsequent arms. Despite this variation there seems to be no doubt that all these revolvers are survivors of the 1859 shipment of 24 Model 1851 Colts.

It has not been possible at this time to uncover any details of history or issue, but the facts presented, even without historical background, still represent an important find of a complete shipment of historic colonial W.A. Police arms. These arms have now been substantially identified, shedding light on the little known London production and colonial purchases. The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr Max Laucke of South Australia.

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